

Opening Statement of the Honorable Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Ensuring the Security, Stability, Resilience, and
Freedom of the Global Internet”
April 2, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I want to thank all of our witnesses today for clearing their schedules to come before our Communications and Technology Subcommittee to discuss the Obama administration’s proposal to transfer to another entity oversight of the Domain Name System. I’ve read all of your testimony and appreciate your counsel. I especially appreciated the thoughtful scenarios and stress tests noted in Mr. DelBianco’s testimony. Those are precisely the kinds of issues that get our attention.

I cannot overstate the importance of freedom of the Internet from government control. Nor can I overstate the threat from foreign governments who seek to control, tax, censor, and otherwise impose their own agendas on the Internet. That’s why the House has unanimously passed both a resolution and legislation that affirm our policy that the United States should promote a global Internet, free from government control. I do hope the Senate takes up our latest measure with all due haste.

Obviously, the administration’s proposal has sparked furious debate and brought together in opposition some interesting former combatants ranging from Karl Rove to Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich.

I called today’s hearing to get answers to exactly what the Obama administration is proposing and what it is not. Are the goals of security, stability, resilience and freedom of the Internet compatible with a multi-stakeholder managed Domain Name System?

The multi-stakeholder model is a key part of the success of the Internet, with engineers, academics, public interest groups, and users collaborating in a bottom-up, non-governmental approach. The decentralized management structure provides the flexibility to evolve and disperses the risks posed by bad actors. However, once NTIA gives up its current role, who will fill the void? What assurance do Internet users have that such a change will not lead to foreign government mischief? If things go astray, is there a path back for NTIA?

The role that NTIA performs, though somewhat ministerial, has served as an important backstop. While I am heartened to see the criteria that NTIA set forth for any acceptable proposal included a prohibition on a government-led or intergovernmental organization taking control, I remain concerned about how to prevent such a take over in the future. What safeguards are in place?

We cannot allow institutions such as the United Nations or the International Telecommunication Union to insert themselves into the functioning of the Domain Name System now, or as part of any successor solution.

Make no mistake; threats to the openness and freedom of the Internet are real. Leaders such as Vladimir Putin have explicitly announced their desire to gain control of the Internet. Just a year and a half ago, at the World Conference on International Telecommunications in Dubai, a group of nations attempted to use a treaty on telephone networks and services as a backdoor to impose policies that could have thwarted the robust and open nature of the Internet.

I’m sure the administration understands why I am so concerned about any proposed changes to how the Internet is governed. We need details on how the process will work and the criteria for evaluating proposals. Mr. Shimkus and Mrs. Blackburn have a bill they recently introduced – H.R. 4342 – that would have the GAO study the proposals and present a non-partisan evaluation. This is a prudent idea. Any plan must protect all participants in the Internet ecosystem and demonstrate the successor’s technical ability to manage the IANA functions. If there are not sufficient safeguards in place to prevent foreign

government intrusion, then this concept should go no further. Even with these guarantees, I remain concerned about the opportunities for abuse.

When it comes to the core principles that NTIA and the State Department have put forward I urge them to follow the admonition of Margaret Thatcher and “Don’t Go Wobbly”. There is no putting this genie back in the bottle once the transition begins. We are holding this hearing because far too much is at stake for any uncertainty or ambiguity as to our path forward.

A little less than a year ago, the world was watching as we deliberated H.R. 1580, our unanimously passed bill supporting the multi-stakeholder model. The world, including those deeply concerned about government control of the Internet, is watching again today. This is the administration’s opportunity to make its case and answer our questions. Prove to us that you will conduct this proposed process in a way that leaves no room for error and that will protect the free and open Internet we have all come to expect and rely upon.

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